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PHSB STUDIES

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ACCIDENTAL DEATH AMONG CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina's registered deaths reveal the following:

Accidents are the leading cause of mortality for all age groups between one and 44;

Over half of all deaths between the ages of one and 20 are due to accidents;

Accidental death rates for children and teens in North Carolina are considerably higher than those in the nation.

In an effort to gain insight into the types of accidents which are killing the youngsters of our state, accidental deaths occurring during 1974-78 to children and teenagers residing in North Carolina were examined. For this period, the average annual rate of death due to accidents among N.C. residents under age 20 was 22 percent higher than that for the nation during 1974-77. This comparison is based upon the latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics.

The rate for motor vehicle accidental deaths was 31 percent higher than the U.S. rate; the non-motor-vehicle accidental death rate was 11 percent higher. N.C. rates for the five leading causes of non-motor-vehicle accidental deaths were all higher than national rates for those under age 20 as follows: fires, 29 percent; drowning, 22 percent; firearms, 25 percent; poisoning by solid and liquid substances, 33 percent; and strangulation by ingestion, 22 percent.

Table 1 shows leading causes of death by age group among North Carolina residents under age 20. Except for infants under one year of age, accidents take the lead in every age group. For ages 1-19, the accidental death rate (deaths per 100,000 population) is almost eight times as high as the rate for the next leading cause of death, cancer. Though accidents rank relatively low among the leading causes of infant death, the total accidental death rate for infants is higher than rates for any of the other ages under 20, except ages 15-19.

During the five-year period 1974-78, a total of 3,734 children and teenagers residing in North Carolina reportedly died from accidental causes to account for 28 percent of all deaths in this age group. Table 2 shows total and accidental deaths with average annual rates by age group, race, and leading types of accidents. A majority, 60 percent, of accidental deaths were the result of motor vehicle accidents which killed North Carolina residents under age 20 at an average annual rate of 23.5 per 100,000 population.

Accidents involving motor vehicles were the leading cause of accidental deaths in all age groups under 20, including infants; sixty percent were 15-19 years old. For these older teenagers, the motor vehicle fatality rate was almost two and a half times the rate of other accidental deaths; it was 78 percent higher than the motor vehicle death rate for all North Carolina residents. Other age groups under 20, including infants, experienced motor vehicle death rates at least 49 percent lower than the over-all state rate.